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ABSTRACT

Standardized written tests required for teacher licensure and certification often prevent or restrict qualified deaf and hard of hearing individuals from entering their chosen profession. These individuals do not have the same access to English as hearing people and the sentence structures, vocabulary, and language style in standardized tests are often unfamiliar and extremely challenging. It is important that an alternative assessment system be developed to test deaf teachers knowledge and skills so that more deaf teachers can begin teaching. The presence of deaf teachers in the classroom with deaf children should be increased because: (1) they have a unique capability to communicate with deaf children; (2) they have a special understanding of the background, community, and culture of deaf persons; (3) they provide a much-needed positive role model for deaf learners; and (4) they provide a special means of continuing education for their hearing counterparts. Portfolio assessment is suggested as a good approach to evaluating deaf teacher candidates qualifications. Some of the portfolio components might be: course grades, constructed responses to a classroom teaching situation, observation and written evaluation by the candidate's student teaching supervisor, written lesson plans, written recommendations from professionals, and results of an interview with the candidate by a small panel of practitioners. Experimental use might be made of a video-taped lesson. (MAH)

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ALTERNATIVES TO TEACHER TESTING FOR DEAF CANDIDATES

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Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States are increasingly taking leadership roles and making positive contributions to professions such as teaching, recreation services, psychology, and social work. At the same time, standardized written tests are increasingly being required for licensure and certification. These tests often prevent or restrict qualified deaf persons from entering their chosen professions. Many complex factors contribute to this dilemma. But at the heart of the problem is the reality that deaf and hard of hearing people do not have the same access to English as hearing people. Thus, the sentence structures, vocabulary, and language style used in standardized tests are often unfamiliar and extremely challenging.

Educational reform and teacher examinations

Considerable criticism since the mid-1980s has been leveled *at teachers* themselves and their preparation skill level; a predictable outcome of that criticism, then, was the imposition of mandated tests to qualify would-be teachers for entering the profession, as well as other or the same tests for those teachers already in practice in order to retain their certification or to obtain promotions.

Teacher testing, while designed to assure teacher quality, has also resulted in the most significant barrier to access for deaf persons entering the field of teaching.

The reform movement in American education has had several manifestations and different emphases. For example, some of the reforms have been initiated by governors, others by state legislatures, and others by business groups; at the same time, the subject of the reform reports has at times been focused on elementary and secondary alone, at other times on higher education, and on still other occasions more recently on teacher education as well.

The forms of teacher tests, gradually mandated state by state in the U.S.A. by many of the states since 1989, have included: the National Teachers Examination (NTE) or PRAXIS series developed by Educational Testing Service – a multiple-choice test including sections on communication skills, knowledge, and pedagogy; the specialized subject area sections of the Examination for secondary school subject teachers; and a variety of state-developed tests, also in multiple-choice written format, which are different from state to state.

Data from the administration of mandated teacher tests to deaf candidates indicate that a number of deaf candidates have elected not to *take* the test itself because of concern about being able to pass it and elect instead to leave the profession.

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The issue of fairness is an old one in the area of testing in American education, and has been raised numerous times in the twentieth century by various groups. State-mandated tests of student achievement as a high school graduation requirement, for example, have been challenged in a number of states in terms of their fairness to minority students; similarly, more recently, the fairness of teacher tests for minority groups have been challenged in other states because of the prevention of access to the profession by minority teachers at a time when it is more important than ever that the number of minority group teachers *increase* due to the changing nature of the American school population toward a far greater ethnic diversity than in the past. The specific question of the appropriate "cut-off" score appears to be an initial important question in such cases because that point determines how a decision is made to permit the candidate to continue or not continue in her or his program. However, other issues also pertain. Those questions include the appropriateness of test content for the population being tested, whether or not preparation of a special nature may assist test-takers to improve their scores, the relationship between test results and the lack of test-wiseness by deaf test-takers, and the choice of items for the test in relation to the background of the test-takers.

While we see positive indications that certification officials have begun to properly recognize the problem cited in this proposal, these actions also make imperative the development of an alternative assessment system. Without an alternative system there is no assurance, as standardized licensure lists are designed to do, of the deaf teacher's knowledge and skills.

To carry out this mission, it is important to involve expertise from many diverse fields and perspectives. Only with the support of a broad based constituency will deaf professionals gain access to their professions and to the clients and students who so clearly need their assistance and leadership.

Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education, Judith Heumann, recently said, "All education efforts should be aimed at helping to ensure disabled individuals can become an integrated part of society" (Special Education Report, 1992). We can in part, measure the success of this integration by the number of disabled individuals who can assume roles of leadership in society. There are far too few deaf teachers in the classroom if this is a measure of the success of our efforts to include disabled persons in society.

There are several important reasons for increasing the inclusion of deaf teachers in the classrooms with deaf children. First, deaf teachers have a unique capability to communicate with deaf children. Regardless of communication mode or the language, the deaf of hard of hearing teacher many times is more adept at understanding students' communication.

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Second, deaf teachers have a special understanding of the background, community, and "culture" of deaf persons, and therefore have a unique capability to carry out instruction in a way which is based on a first-hand understanding of the culture of the child; in turn, deaf teachers are also able, therefore, to provide deaf learners with a sense of appreciation and self-esteem in regard to that culture, by helping them to learn more about the rich tradition which is a part of that culture. Teachers and children who can relate to each other because of a shared characteristic such as both being deaf can have a very positive impact on the teaching and learning process. Increased motivation and achievement can result from this relationship (Evans, 1992). Improved communication can facilitate a more in depth understanding of content. Most important, improved understanding of the child's language, including correct or hard to understand usage of language, can lead to children being more interactive with the subject which leads to longer-term and more in-depth learning. In order to improve thinking skills students must be able to interact with the teacher, and a teacher's ability to understand and be understood are critical to this process.

Third, qualified deaf professionals provide a much-needed positive role model for deaf learners, who, despite frequent implications by the hearing world that to be deaf is to be less than worthy, must have a positive goal to which to aspire as adults; recent experience is indicating that qualified deaf adults can be successful in a wide variety of professions in the entire society. Deaf children need to sense that positive hope by identifying with such successful deaf adults.

Finally, deaf teachers as members of teaching staffs in which there will always be both hearing and deaf professionals, provide a special means of continuing education for their hearing counterparts in the sense of enabling hearing professionals to better understand Deaf Culture as well as to sharpen their skills in communication and understanding of the special needs of deaf learners. A critical mass of deaf professionals, however, is essential in the profession in order for that regular communication among deaf and hearing professionals to occur.

This paper does not suggest waiving standards; in fact, quite the opposite. While many organizations and an increasing number of states are advocating that licensure-tests be waived for deaf and hard of hearing test takers, this action does not ensure that unqualified teachers are prevented from entering the classroom. While these tests perhaps are unfair to deaf test takers, there must be an alternative way to ensure competencies. At this time there is no alternative way and no other plans to develop such an alternative.

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The Role of Teacher Competency Examinations

While teacher certification exams are but one measure of teacher competence, much of the time they serve as a "gatekeeper". Only those who pass the exam may then have their other evidence of competence examined. This practice flaunts a basic tenet of American Education Research Association (AERA) that strongly suggests multiple measures be used in all educational assessment (Brown, 1980). This paper addresses the need for multiple measures.

For most white hearing teacher applicants, the test requirements represent a small hurdle; few fail; however, for minority (including Deaf) applicants, the tests represent a very real barrier; for many these very different test results suggest a culturally and linguistically biased test (Corten, 1988; Moulton, Serwatha, Medley and Gianh, 1974).

Some colleges, including schools of law and medicine, have stopped requiring standardized test results for applicants or allow alternative measures in part because of the deleterious effect on minority applicants. These results of such action by a number of professional schools including programs at Johns Hopkins, Harvard, MIT to name a few, have been very favorable (Albina, 1987). Thus, the same system needs to be applied to a system of licensure for deaf teacher candidates.

Support for seeking alternatives to assessing teacher competencies comes from other groups whose test scores do not reflect their demonstrated ability to teach. One such group is Native Americans. Sixty-six percent of one group of Native Americans failed a licensure exam (Gallegos, A.M., 1984). This result directly led to the dismissal of 5 native American teachers who were replaced with 5 Anglo teachers who had passed the test. The Anglo teachers may have achieved as little as one more multiple-choice test question "correct" than their Native American peers. Gallegos called for alternative measures to remedy this disproportionately high failure rate by minority test takers.

Alternative Approaches to Testing Deaf Examinees

According to Ragosta (1991), providing accommodations of extra time and the use of an interpreter for instructions does not appear to solve the testing problems of most deaf test takers. Because of difficulties in accessing and mastering the English language, many deaf students communicate better in the visual mode and perform better in sign than in English. If deaf students have life-style accommodations involving the use of sign, should not that life-style accommodation be part of the reasonable accommodations provided for standardized testing? When and

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under what conditions could/should sign language be a reasonable accommodation? Some answers are already apparent; others may need discussion before solutions can be found.

Recent research on essay production (Mounty, 1990) has demonstrated the existence in teacher training programs of deaf students who can produce passing essays in ASL but not in English. Although deaf students are educated to produce essays in English but not in ASL, the fact that they can produce better essays in sign indicates greater ability in communication than essay tests currently measure. Should deaf individuals be allowed to sign their written essays? Should they be required to write an essay but have the option to sign one as well? Should the scores be averaged, or should there be two alternate pathways for demonstrating language competence? These are questions requiring further study. If alternate pathways were available for demonstrating language competence, perhaps more deaf teachers would be available to teach deaf children. In a bilingual, bicultural approach to the education of deaf children, alternate pathways would seem to be appropriate (Ragosta, 1990).

Research Needed

Thus, the disproportionately high number of qualified and academically successful deaf professionals who do not at this time achieve the designated passing scores on several national and state-used standardized measures of professional competence leading to professional licensure in several professions, presents a national and world problem of wasted human resources and a deprivation of deaf clients' and students' opportunities to work with a qualified deaf professional.

The problem inherent in many such state-mandated examinations include: presentation of the materials in a modality that is not accessible to deaf persons, thus grounding test items in a form of English that is sometimes idiomatic; English language conventions that have not been accessible to deaf persons; the inclusion of content in test items that is not in the experience of deaf persons; and the establishment of time constraints that do not permit the qualified deaf professional to work through such difficulties (National Task Force, 1992). However, recent experience indicates that even the accommodations of additional time and the provision of manual versus written modalities, are not sufficient to provide equitable assessment of deaf candidates on English-based tests (Lytle, 1994).

Thus, alternatives are needed for the types of assessment that have been used until the present, so as to enable a significant number of qualified deaf persons to become certified to begin work with deaf students. Yet the widely accepted research literature indicates that employment testing must follow several guidelines:

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-"The rationale for criterion relevance should be made explicit. It should include a description of the job in question and of the judgments used to determine relevance."

-Content validation should be based on a thorough and explicit definition of the content domain of interest. For job selection, classification, and promotion, the characterization of the domain should be based on job analysis."

-When the content-related validation evidence is to stand as support for the use of a test in selection or promotion, a close link between test content and job content should be demonstrated."

-When content-related evidence of validity is presented, the rationale...should be stated clearly. The rationale should establish that the knowledge, skills, and abilities...are the major determinants of proficiency in that domain."

-"A clear explanation should be given of any technical basis for any cut score used to make personal decisions..." **(Brown, 1980)**.

Research now needs to be carried out specifically on the application of the portfolio method to examining deaf professionals' competencies in an equitable manner.

The Portfolio Method

In the field of evaluation, the concept of the "portfolio" is becoming more widely accepted. A portfolio in relation to evaluation usually consists of an assemblage of several different types of material which demonstrate the achievement of some set of competencies for whomever is preparing to make a judgment of some kind about the individual being evaluated. The stress in the portfolio method is on multiple kinds of measures, rather than the reliance upon any single measure or type of measure. Taken together, then, this collection or portfolio, provides a complete picture of the individual in order to ensure that the judgment being made is based on all of the possible and practical evidence about the candidate (as opposed to a single measure such as a test which also represents a single type of measurement, namely, ability to respond to written multiple-choice items on paper).

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Components

It is proposed that the portfolio consist of the following components, which taken together, would provide a "bank" of material that would enable a licensing agency to make a comprehensive and justifiable decision on an application. The components would include the following:

(1) Course grades in courses relating to content knowledge and pedagogy.

(2) Constructed responses in short-essay format to situations requiring the candidate to develop a response to a classroom teaching situation.

(3) The observation and written evaluation by the candidate's supervisor during the final internship, in relation to a variety of outcomes relating to performance in the classroom with learners and a number of skills and knowledge related to teaching.

(4) Written plans for instruction (lesson plans) and written units of instruction for series of related teaching experiences on the same theme over a period of weeks.

(5) Written recommendations from professionals who have worked closely with the candidate.

(6) Results of interview with the candidate by a small panel of practioners.

In addition, although assessments of classroom performance with existing regular full-time students are not normally included for initial licensure (although they are included for later permanent licensure), it is also proposed in this project that experimental use be made by selected individuals with a selected video-taped lesson as one additional means of evaluation related to performance.

Activities

The activities would involve the following:

(1) Interview with existing, experienced professionals in deaf education to determine the most appropriate content to be included in the portfolio.

(2) Identification of a panel of deaf and hearing evaluators who would evaluate "blindly" the materials for portfolios from ten different graduating students who are deaf.

(3) comparison of scores of these ten candidates on the standardized teacher test mentioned earlier in the introductory section, as a comparison measure with the results from the other components of the actual portfolio.

(4) Development and administration of five different constructed response written items, requiring candidates to respond to classroom and professional situations.

(5) Analysis of course grades of the ten candidates.

(6) Analysis and summary and strengths and weaknesses noted in the evaluation reports by the supervisor for the candidates during their final internship.

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(7) Analysis of written lesson plans and units by each candidate, according to criteria such as: sequence, use of materials, appropriate use of activities, conceptual accuracy, and appropriate use of classroom evaluation methods.

(8) Conducting of individual interviews using a series of five questions, by the panel of three professionals, with each candidate in regard to the candidate's ability to respond to (a) hypothetical classroom situations and (b) professional issues in the field.

In addition, a video-tape would be made of three volunteer candidates from the group of ten for analysis by the trained professionals on the above-mentioned committee in regard to teaching performance; this aspect of the activity would be on a small-scale only because this level of assessment is normally not done until after the individual has had some time as a full-time paid professional in the classroom rather than at the time of initial licensure.

Conclusion

A systematic approach to the development of an alternative to standardized teacher examinations will benefit the field, in a way that should be equitable for deaf candidates; the use of portfolios is becoming more widely accepted in the general field, and the promise of a new approach is expected to enable a new corps of qualified deaf professionals to work with deaf learners.

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